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Points of View

The Ending for Subtribal Names in Zoology

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Some families of animals, particularly among the insects, contain hundreds or even thousands of genera, and tens of thousands of species. In many such families, a need seems to be felt for additional taxal steps between the subfamily and genus levels, a need only partly met by the now familiar category of tribe. Formal subtribes are now solidly established and much used in the literature of some groups, e.g., the Carabidae and Staphylinidae (Coleoptera), and some families of Hymenoptera. There is perhaps a good case to be made against the establishment of more new *formal* categories between tribe and genus, and I for one would find it difficult to argue against some more informal and flexible kind of subdivision.

Nevertheless, the formal subtribe seems to be here to stay, and therefore we ought to give it proper attention in developing taxonomic methods and rules. The subtribe would, I think, require no more than routine attention were it not for one thing: the ending *"-ina."* This ending has caught on, at least among entomologists, and some want its use formalized through the Rules.

The terminal *-ina* is in my estimation an unfortunate choice; I shall now take up some reasons why. In the first place, *-ina,* is also the ending for a large number of generic names, so that a subtribal name with this ending, whether read or heard spoken, is not automatically distinguished as a subtribe, instead of as a genus or subgenus. Secondly, when spoken in several of the commonest languages or regional accents of these languages, subtribal names would be difficult to distinguish from the *-inae* ending for the subfamily or the *-ini* ending for tribe. Already, the similarity of *-inae* and *-ini* as pronounced by many speakers has caused confusion to listeners. Thirdly, we must recognize that vernacular forms based on the formal ones, now very useful when writing in common languages (e.g., French and English vernacular endings *-ine, -ines*) would have their associations distributed over three levels, instead of the present two (subfamily, tribe). The purpose of the ending, I take it, is to identify the level of the taxon. If the endings for different taxal levels are not sufficiently distinct, both in writing and in speaking, in formal as well as vernacular usage, then the endings do not serve the purpose. The confusion already raised by the similarity of *-inae* and *-ini* is regrettable, but these endings have now become so solidly fixed in usage that we probably have to live with them and continue to add some distinguishing term to the context so that we can tell them apart in practice. But the threat to clarity posed by the addition of a third scarcely distinguishable category, and one which furthermore is hardly separable in some situations from the genus category, is serious enough to call for the consideration of an alternative ending for the formal subtribal name.

It may be as well to mention here the schemes proposed by Stenzel and by Hubbs (see *Copenhagen Decisions on Zoological Nomenclature,* London, 1953, pp. 33-36), which seek to set up standard endings for a number of categories between family and genus. While the intentions behind these proposals are perhaps praiseworthy, the actual endings themselves as so far set forth are in large part subject to the same difficulties that I have mentioned as besetting the *-ina* ending. Adoption of either of these sys-

tems would just about preclude the use of vernaculars based on the formal names.

Without giving the matter much thought, I have in the past used the ending *-iti* for subtribes, and now it seems to me that a strong argument can be made for *-iti* as a better alternative to *-ina*. In the first place, *-iti* is the ending for extremely few generic names, most of which must be based on barbarisms or formed as anagrams. Offhand, I cannot recall a single generic name with the ending *-iti*, although a number with *-ina* endings come to mind instantly. Secondly, *-iti* is not easily confused, either written or spoken, with the endings of other taxa at and below the family level and above the species level. Thirdly, the *-iti* ending is readily transformed into a distinctive vernacular ending (French and English -ite, -ites) that will serve to prevent confusion in the less formal kinds of written or oral discussion.

I am not prepared to enter into arguments about the classical uses of *-iti*, or its present suitability on the basis of these uses. However, it is anticipated that *-iti* will be found sufficiently consistent with both classical usage and modern nomenclatorial requirements.

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Transliteration of Greek Words

In Section F of the Second Schedule of the proposed amended Rules a table is given to indicate the manner in which Greek words should be transliterated. The unofficial version issued by the Society of Systematic Zoology contains an error, in that the *iota* subscript has been omitted from the letter *omega* in the fourteenth example. The letter *omega* is, of course, transliterated as "o," and the improper diphthong as "oe."

It is unfortunate that the example illustrating the transliteration of the final *eta* should employ a word which was latinised in classical times as *Pirene*, and was never inflected in the first declension. It is scarcely less distressing that "Hippocrena, not Hippochrenes" should have been chosen to illustrate the transliteration of *kappa*, since this name was apparently known to the literary world of Rome only as *Hippocrene*.

It is always advisable to ascertain whether a particular Greek word was adopted into the Latin language in classical times. The Latin form can then be used with the assurance that it is in strict conformity with Article 3 of the Rules. One reason for this hint is that proper names were frequently adopted without transliteration of the final letter (*Phyle, Phylace*), technical terms with the minimum of change, and common names with full transliteration (*phylaca*). The simplest criterion in this matter is that if a word is listed in a standard Latin lexicon as having been used as part of the language, then it is a Latin word, and the onus of transliteration does not fall on its user. This criterion validates the use of such words as *oxalme, paramese, cataclysmos, parelion, parergon,* and *hepatizon,* all of which contravene the recommendations for transliteration cited in Section F. Rome adopted a wide assemblage of technical terms from the Greek, with the result that a word like *"parelion"* was just as much a part of the Latin language of classical times as "parhelion" is of current English.

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